

September 25, 2021 by



The Middle East exploded once more this spring, around the crucial issue that fuels an interminable conflict: the Palestine question.

Wars have been fought over it, and terrorist operations of various types have been conducted. All in a setting that sees the great powers (the US and Russia) engaged in flexing their muscles, and exploiting states, political and terrorist movements to shore up their power in this corner of the world.

Recent years have seen the advent of various “regional” powers (Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia) intent on operating in a similar fashion, with the aim of carving out their own area of influence (hegemony), in agreement with one superpower or another, depending on the circumstances.

From the Second World War onwards, the Israel/Palestine question has unfolded in an area that is crucial for the development of the global economy due to the presence of oil, the main energy source of the twentieth century. To ‘govern’ this part of the world, political stability is vital, and the state of Israel has always been, and remains, crucial in this regard.

While in the future the role of oil is destined to diminish as other forms of energy

September 25, 2021 by

come into play, this remains a strategic hotspot: a crossroads between Asia, Africa and Europe, a key leg of the “Belt and Road initiative”, characterised by one state equipped with nuclear weapons (Israel) and another that wants them (Iran): governing this area is therefore essential in terms of maintaining a global balance.

Attempts to stabilize the zone with a solution based on the “two peoples-two states” formula, with negotiations of various kinds, have proved unsuccessful. But even if this approach had been successful, it would certainly not have contributed to a “lasting” peaceful relationship between the two states. Borders are drawn based on power relations between states at any given time, and these can subsequently change, giving rise to new demands.

As Alexander Hamilton writes in “The Federalist”, *“To look for a continuation of harmony between a number of independent, unconnected sovereignties in the same neighbourhood, would be to disregard the uniform course of human events, and to set at defiance the accumulated experience of ages”*.

An independent, entirely sovereign Palestinian state amidst other independent, entirely sovereign states would only generate increased conflict among states. This is the lesson that should have been learned from the history of the European continent through the centuries, and up to the tragedy of the Second World War. States with absolute sovereignty are by nature war-like (Kant).

We can therefore imagine that the Middle East peace process should involve:

1. Putting an end to the Russian-American tug of war for (ultimately gaining) control over the area, by including the European Union as a power interested in political stabilization based on the economic development of the area, no longer in thrall to oil, but linked to the energy transition towards a sustainable economy, starting with agriculture. Israel’s technological capabilities would be made available to the entire area

September 25, 2021 by

(which would benefit from them to develop), in exchange for gaining access to a large market, something that Israel needs.

2. In this context we can therefore imagine an Israeli-Palestinian Federation as an initial nucleus of economic integration with neighbouring countries, thus also removing them from the interests of the regional powers in the vicinity.

All of this is based on the assumption that the EU, which stands to gain from a solution of this kind succeeds in exploiting this crisis, the umpteenth, to carve out a role for itself in foreign policy, thus discovering that the strategic interests of its main countries (Germany, France and Italy) coincide with European interests in stabilizing the Middle East, which also borders on the Mediterranean.

Europe recently accomplished a quantum leap in budgetary terms to tackle the economic crisis triggered by the pandemic, by creating “European fiscal capacity”: common debt on future investments and increased budget, with a view to introducing new, additional own resources.

It is time for a quantum leap in European foreign policy too. The Middle East is the test-bed, right now.

It is up to the European Parliament to come up with solutions and not just “hope” that others will take care of it.

The European Commission has to take the initiative and lead the way, not wait for the European Council.

It is also up to European citizens to point out that political coexistence is possible, even between different peoples, religions and cultures. The construction of Europe proves it.

September 25, 2021 by



“Europe was born in a crisis and will be forged in crises”, Altiero Spinelli used to say, convinced that European unity was “the political project of our time”.

27th December 2020 will probably go down in Europeans’ collective memory as the day when the Union, as it began distributing the vaccine to all its member countries, showed that it was capable of offering its citizens protection and acting as a united front against the virus, a common enemy which has had a devastating impact on our health and our way of life. Ursula Von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, has stated that the vaccine will also be distributed to the Western Balkan countries (not yet members of the EU) and North Africa: this represents the first concrete step in a European foreign policy.

An institution that guarantees these “common goods” is already a state, albeit incomplete.

Faced with this huge global crisis, the European Union reacted promptly. Despite

September 25, 2021 by

the handicap of a decision-making process that does not always allow majority voting, the EU has made clear political choices, equipping itself with the tools to face both the pandemic and the serious economic downturn generated by the lockdown.

Firstly, the prompt intervention of the ECB enabled the purchase of government bonds from the countries most affected by the pandemic. Then the Commission suspended the “Stability and Growth Pact” to allow states to go into debt to fund the first measures to support businesses and citizens; it also set up a “European unemployment scheme” (SURE) worth 100 billion euros.

But, above all, last May the Commission – which now increasingly resembles a “European government” – launched the *Recovery Plan for Europe*, whose name recalls the Marshall Plan (the European Recovery Program), the initiative that helped rebuild Europe after the war.

As is known, the Plan is based on two instruments. The first is Next Generation EU, namely 750 billion euros in investments aimed at funding the recovery and, at the same time, managing the transformation of the European economy towards the energy transition and the digital revolution. The second is the increase in budget (from 1% to 2% of European GDP), and the addition of European debt securities (union bonds) to finance investments. New “own resources” for the Union are also in the pipeline, from a carbon border tax (to reduce CO₂ emissions), to a web tax (on tech giants), as well as the introduction of measures to combat tax havens and money laundering.

The Plan’s “political philosophy” is clear: to put Europe back on its feet and drive change, in the direction of the Green Deal and the digital revolution, to enable the Union to face global challenges on an equal footing with the other superpowers. “Nation states are no longer the answer” is a sentiment shared by Angela Merkel, leader of the most important EU country, and Ursula Von der Leyen,

September 25, 2021 by

representative of the “European government”: two women who personify the shift from national to European politics.

The Recovery Plan therefore represents a strong, united political response, which has made it possible to overcome the flaw that “hobbled” the Maastricht treaty (creating a currency without a state, as is generally said), teaming the euro with the first form of European economic policy: investments based on common resources, guaranteed by a stronger budget. In this respect, the Plan is therefore revolutionary: it marks the introduction of a European fiscal capacity, additional to and operating in parallel with that of the Member States. And all of this has been achieved without reforming the Treaties: the Union has thus strengthened its implicitly federal nature, upholding the principle that European solidarity is possible if there is common control over the use of resources, guaranteed by common rules and institutions.

This philosophy also enabled the “compromise” reached at the end of the year, which establishes a link between the distribution of common resources and respect for the rule of law. Like all compromises, it is not entirely satisfactory, but it has allowed the resources of Next Gen EU to be linked to respect for the rule of law, removing the veto threatened by Poland and Hungary.

The objectives of the Recovery Plan are valid not only for Europe, but also the rest of the world, which has to find a cooperative, non-conflictual way of managing both the environmental crisis and the technological revolution. Europe is leading the energy transition and helping to write the rules for the digital revolution, showing people that there needs to be a “common sovereignty” over a number of global public goods, at the service of humanity.

September 25, 2021 by



There is growing awareness that, these days, mankind is faced with difficult choices. The unfair distribution of resources and power in the world, the resulting large-scale-migration, environmental crises and pandemics - also caused by a deteriorating connection between men, nature and the land - , the digital revolution and the conflicts between world powers; all these are signals that we are going through an *epochal change*, rather than an epoch of change.

In 1941, in the midst of World War II, a few antifascists who were interned on the island of Ventotene realised that an epoch was closing. The European system could no longer provide for the progress of its peoples. For many centuries, there had been a repetitive pattern, steady swing between fights for hegemony and attempts to strike a new balance among European powers. The actors on the scene were nation-states, the main instrument of their confrontation was war, and

September 25, 2021 by

the scene was Europe – back then, the centre of the world.

The *Ventotene Manifesto* postulated the end of nation-states as a historic and political fact founded on the principle of absolute sovereignty. The first federalist movements were launched: the *Movimento Federalista Europeo* in 1943, then the *Union des Fédéralistes Européens* in 1946 and the *World Federalist Movement* in 1947. Those profound intuitions gave rise to the long process of European unification, based on the establishment of common supranational institutions. The relations between states, previously founded on violence and war, were transformed into relations based on law and peace. The start of the first supranational era in history put an end to the constant swing between balance and hegemony among European states.

For almost forty years, the world was governed by the balance of powers between the USA and the URSS, based on the nuclear deterrent. The process of European unification developed in the “west”; only here was the supranational process able to coexist with the values of freedom, democracy and social justice. In the west, the dominant power provided the two essential public goods: security and economic development, starting with monetary stability (the dollar standard).

1989 marked the end of that balance. What ensued was a short-lived attempt by the US to become the only global superpower (unipolarism), governing the world economic development. The start of European monetary unification in 1992 and the financial and economic crisis in 2007 showed that the US could not guarantee the development of the world alone, in spite of their technological and military power.

Other continental powers have emerged, or re-emerged: China, Russia, possibly India, and more. Seventy years of European integration have set up a state-like, though incomplete structure. The European Union has both federal traits – in those areas where its organs decide by majority – and confederal, where decisions are still made by unanimity (taxation and security, mostly).

September 25, 2021 by

As the world is congregating around global powers, this means that this is a *state-based world system* which, by its own nature, will necessarily swing between “*balance and hegemony*”, just as it used to do: in turns, actors will try to secure a strong competitive advantage over others (e.g. in digital or space technologies).

With its focus on the absolute sovereignty of states, this system will generally fall back on political models that were typical of the old European system and caused two world wars in the 20th Century. Back then, the development of the production process needed a continental market, the lack of which, coupled with a political framework lacking a “*common governance*”, led to war. Those confined in Ventotene became federalists because they learned that lesson and found the correct answer (“*for a free and united Europe*”).

Today, the globalization of markets, production, finance and consumption, as well as the growing pressure for international mobility for individuals, are nothing but the signs of deep movements towards a *growing world unity*. These signs can be seen in the *major revolutions and crises* that humankind is experiencing, bringing with them a new definition of the relationship between mankind, technology and nature. If it is not governed by global rules and institutions, the digital revolution can result in a new hierarchic order of states based on their “*scientific know-how*” - again, the power of a single state over others. If it is not managed by global democratic institutions, the environmental revolution risks endangering the balanced relationship between the human species and other forms of life on the Earth - again, triggering a possible fight among states to control resources and for the survival of the fittest.

What emerges is once more the historic dichotomy between the development of production, which is inherently global, and the underlying political and institutional structure, still based on nation-states (even though they are sometimes continent-sized). A few superpowers compete to be global rulers. The war with weapons is replaced by competition on international trade, digital

September 25, 2021 by

technologies and, soon, space control. This shift is favoured by the present world order, so terribly similar to the order of European states in the 20th Century, which caused the annihilation of peoples on the old continent.

This is why it is so necessary now to go back to the alternative of Ventotene and to its fundamental truth (*political division among men produces war*) and to call to action, in order to build the first global supranational institutions: for environment, wealth, international trade, the monetary system and the digital world. Confirming the primacy of international politics over home politics, will support economic and political integration in Africa, the Middle-East and Latin America, because the unity of these areas will be a prerequisite for them to play an active role on the global stage. This, in turn, will strongly push ahead the process of political unification in Europe. Only with its own foreign policy, security policy and fiscal capacity will a united Europe be able to share the world stage on an equal footing with other continental powers, so as to lay the founding stones of a *common world home*.

From this point of view, stronger EU institutions will turn the Union into an “open federation”, a model to be followed on the path towards a world federation.

The main point therefore is not to tackle the challenges linked to production processes and their institutional consequences on the basis of the idea of “power” (of one’s country), nor of a “closed” Europe that should balance other powers. Quite the opposite. Shaping the Union as an *open federation* is the essential prerequisite to set up an institutional framework that can strengthen the universal principle of “common interest”.

This is what mankind needs in order to progress on the path of unity.

Thus, *Ventotene is still a lighthouse for thought and action.*